

## Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 7565

USMISSION USUN IMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY TANANARIVE

AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 03640

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR UNSC CN

SUBJECT: COMORO ISLANDS IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL:  
BACKGROUND AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. FOR BENEFIT OF DEPARTMENT AND USUN IN CONTEXT CURRENT SECURITY COUNCIL DEBATE ON COMORO ISLAND COMPLAINT AGAINST FRANCE, FOLLOWING IS HISTORICAL SUMMARY OF THE PROBLEM ALONG WITH EMBASSY'S RECOMMENDATION FOR A USG POSITION.

2. GOF DECISIONS ON INDEPENDENCE

IN LAST YEAR OF POMPIDOU PRESIDENCY, 1973-1974, PRIME MINISTER MESSMER TOOK DECISION THAT COMOROS WOULD BEGIN TRANSITION TO INDEPENDENCE BASED ON SELF-DETERMINATION OF COMORO PEOPLE. MESSMER STIPULATED THAT EACH OF THE FOUR ISLANDS WOULD BE CONSULTED SEPARATELY BY REFERENDUM ON WHETHER THEY DESIRED INDEPENDENCE OR TO REMAIN ASSOCIATED WITH FRANCE IN SOME WAY. THIS DECISION ON SEPARATE CONSULTATIONS ON THE FOUR  
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ISLANDS WAS BASED LARGELY ON INTENSIVE LOBBYING BY

MAYOTTE INTERESTS WHO WERE WELL ORGANIZED IN PARIS.  
THE DESIRE OF MAYOTTE'S POPULATION TO REMAIN FRENCH  
STRUCK A RESPONSIVE CHORD AMONG GAULLISTS.

### 3. GISCARD'S ACTIONS

POMPIDOU DIED AND GISCARD CAME TO POWER BEFORE ANY  
ACTION WAS TAKEN ON COMOR INDEPENDENCE. UNDER GISCARD,  
THE DOSSIER WAS REOPENED, AND THE MESSMER DECISION WAS  
MODIFIED. COMOROS WOULD CONTINUE THE TRANSITION TO  
INDEPENDENCE, BUT THE FOUR ISLANDS WOULD BE CONSULTED  
AS A SINGLE UNIT, WITH WINNER TAKE ALL INDEPENDENCE OF  
CONTINUED ASSOCIATION WITH FRANCE.

4. GISCARD'S DECISION TO GRANT INDEPENDENCE TO COMOROS  
AS A UNIT BASED ON GOF'S OVERALL AFRICAN POLICY. SINCE  
CARDINAL PRINCIPLE OF OAU IS THAT INDEPENDENCE MUST BE  
BASED ON ORIGINAL COLONIAL BOUNDARIES, GOF DID NOT WISH  
TO UNDERMINE ITS RELATIVELY SUCCESSFUL POSITION IN  
AFRICA THROUGH DISMEMBERMENT OF COMOROS COLONIAL ENTITY.  
ON BASIS THIS REASONING, GOF PREPARED NECESSARY REFEREN-  
DUM, WHICH TOOK PLACE ON DECEMBER 22, 1974. COMORO  
POPULATION VOTED OVERWHELMINGLY FOR INDEPENDENCE, BUT  
THE VOTE ON THE ISLAND OF MAYOTTE WAS OVERWHELMINGLY IN  
FAVOR OF CONTINUED ASSOCIATION WITH FRANCE. IGNORING  
THE MAYOTTE VOTE, AND FAITHFUL TO ITS POLICY, THE GIS-  
CARD GOVERNMENT THEN PREPARED THE NECESSARY INDEPENDENCE  
LEGISLATION TO BE ENACTED BY PARLIAMENT.

5. THE BILL SURFACED IN PARLIAMENT IN JUNE 1975. BE-  
TWEEN THE DECEMBER 1974 REFERENDUM AND THE JUNE 1975  
PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE, THE MAYOTTE LOBBY WORKED VERY HARD  
AND EFFECTIVELY. AS A RESULT, THE ENTIRE GAULLIST AND  
CENTRIST MAJORITY QUICKLY AMENDED THE BILL TO CALL FOR  
A NEW REFERENDUM ON AN ISLAND-BY-ISLAND BASIS. THE GOV-  
ERNMENT ACCEPTED THE AMENDMENTS BECAUSE IT HAD NO OTHER  
CHOICE. IT WAS THE AMENDED BILL OR NO INDEPENDENCE.

6. THE PARLIAMENTARY VOTE TRIGGERED INTERNAL FORCES IN  
THE COMOROS WHERE THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES DECLARED THEIR  
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INDEPENDENCE ON JULY 6, 1975, IN DEFIANCE OF THE FRENCH  
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. THE GOF HAD NO CHOICE, AT THAT  
POINT, BUT TO PROTECT THE PEOPLE OF MAYOTTE AND TO CON-  
SIDER THE OTHER THREE ISLANDS AS DE FACTO INDEPENDENT.  
A MONTH LATER, THE COMOROS GOVERNMENT, WHICH HAD  
DECLARED ITSELF INDEPENDENT UNDER MOHAMMED DJAFFAR, WAS  
OVERTHROWN IN A COUP D'ETAT BY FORCES LED BY ALI SOILIHI.  
THE ANALYSIS OF MOST OBSERVERS AT THAT POINT WAS THAT

THE NEW REGIME WAS PRO-FRENCH, AND WOULD BE WILLING TO ACCEPT A LOOSE FEDERAL SYSTEM UNDER WHICH THE PEOPLE OF MAYOTTE WOULD HAVE SUFFICIENT AUTONOMY TO FEEL SECURE, AND WOULD THEREFORE BE WILLING TO JOIN AN INDEPENDENT COMORO NATION. THE PREVIOUS REGIME WAS HOSTILE TO FRANCE IN THE IDEOLOGICAL MODE OF NEIGHBORING TANZANIA AND MADAGASCAR. NEGOTIATIONS WERE THEREFORE OPENED, BUT

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THE TWO ENTITIES WERE NOT ABLE TO GET TOGETHER DESPITE ALI SOILIH'S MODERATION AND FRIENDLINESS TOWARD FRANCE. THE REASON WAS INTRANSIGENCE ON THE PART OF THE MAYOTTE LEADERSHIP. THEY KNEW THEY HAD THE FRENCH PARLIAMENT ON THEIR SIDE AND COULD GET AWAY WITH BEING INTRANSIGENT. THEY COULD SEE NO WAY OF ASSURING THEIR SECURITY AND IDENTITY IN A LARGER COMORO ENTITY, EVEN IN A LOOSELY FEDERATED ONE.

7. BECAUSE OF THE PARLIAMENTARY MANDATE, AND IN VIEW OF

THE LACK OF PROGRESS IN NEGOTIATIONS ON A FEDERAL SYSTEM, THE GOF SET FEBRUARY 8, 1976, AS THE DATE FOR THE MAYOTTE REFERENDUM. THIS WILL GO AHEAD, AND THERE IS NO QUESTION BUT THAT THE POPULATION WILL VOTE TO REMAIN FRENCH. THE ONLY UNANSWERED QUESTION WILL BE THE FORM OF ASSOCIATION WITH FRANCE. ANOTHER REFERENDUM IN APRIL WILL DETERMINE IF MAYOTTE SHOULD BE A DEPARTMENT OF FRANCE LIKE THE ISLAND OF REUNION, OR AN OVERSEAS TERRITORY LIKE THE SOMALI COAST.

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8. THE BASIC PROBLEM IS ETHNIC AND HISTORICAL. THE POPULATION OF MAYOTTE IS MAINLY OF MALAGASY ORIGIN FROM THE SAKALAVA TRIBE ON THE WEST COAST OF MADAGASCAR. THE POPULATION OF THE OTHER THREE ISLANDS IS MAINLY AFRO-MUSLIM, SIMILAR TO THE ETHNIC GROUPS IN ZANZIBAR AND TANZANIA. IN ADDITION TO THIS CRUCIAL ETHNIC DIFFERENCE THERE IS A HISTORICAL DIFFERENCE WHICH ACCENTUATES MAYOTTE'S SEPARATE IDENTITY. MAYOTTE CAME UNDER FRENCH PROTECTION IN THE 1840'S. THE OTHER THREE ISLANDS BECAME PROTECTORATES ONLY IN THE 1880'S. MOREOVER, THE FOUR ISLANDS WERE NOT ADMINISTERED AS A SINGLE COMORO ENTITY UNTIL 1912. MAYOTTE POPULATION IS LARGELY CHRISTIAN.

9. THE OAU AND THE OTHER LDC'S ARE NOT SWAYED BY THE MAYOTTE ARGUMENT. THE GISCARD GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO SEE THE STRENGTH OF THE MAYOTTE LOBBY IN PARLIAMENT LED TO THE MISTAKE OF THEIR DECIDING TO GRANT INDEPENDENCE AS A SINGLE ENTITY WITHOUT THE ABILITY TO DELIVER. IT IS A SITUATION OF PARLIAMENT MAKING FOREIGN POLICY AGAINST THE WILL OF THE EXECUTIVE AND CAUSING EMBARRASSMENT FOR THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE. IT IS ESPECIALLY UNFORTUNATE, BECAUSE THE CURRENT REGIME IN THE COMOROS IS MODERATE AND WILLING TO HAVE CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH FRANCE. BUT THE MAYOTTE ISSUE IS NOT NEGOTIABLE EVEN FOR A MODERATE REGIME BECAUSE OF THE BASIC AND SACRED PRINCIPLE OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY. FOR THE OAU, OF COURSE, THIS IS THE ONLY PRINCIPLE THAT HOLDS AFRICAN UNITY TOGETHER.

10. RECOMMENDATION FOR POLICY. THE SITUATION IS VERY EMBARRASSING FOR THE FRENCH. THE EXECUTIVE AGREES WITH THE OAU, BUT THE PARLIAMENT RETAINS A GAULLIST SYMPATHY FOR MAYOTTE'S DESIRE TO REMAIN FRENCH. INDEED, THE GAULLISTS HAVE HAD LITTLE ELSE TO MAKE THEM FEEL LIKE GAULLISTS SINCE GISCARD CAME TO POWER. THE GOF WILL HAVE NO CHOICE, THEREFORE, BUT TO VETO A HARSH RESOLUTION, OR ABSTAIN ON A MILD ONE THEY COULD LIVE WITH. BECAUSE OF THE INTRACTABLE NATURE OF THE CONFLICT, IT WOULD APPEAR

WISEST FOR THE USG TO MAINTAIN A LOW PROFILE. WE DO NOT  
WANT TO MAKE LIFE HARDER FOR THE FRENCH THAN THEIR INTER-  
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NAL PROBLEMS HAVE ALREADY ACCOMPLISHED. ON THE OTHER  
HAND, WE SUPPORT THE TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY PRINCIPLE.  
OUR ONLY VIABLE OPTION WOULD BE TO ABSTAIN. AS OF EVEN-  
ING FEBRUARY 5 GOF HAS NOT APPROACHED US CONCERNING OUR  
VOTE.  
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